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Mr. *STAMPER*'s
SERMON

Preach'd at

CLAPHAM,

SEPT. 5, 1725.



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*The Nature and Excellency
of Universal Benevolence.*

A
SERMON

Preach'd at

CLAPHAM in *Surry*,

SEPTEMBER 5, 1725.

By THOMAS STAMPER, A. M.



L O N D O N:

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The Manuscript
of Universal History

A

SERMON

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Printed by W. Mackenzie & Co.
in Great Britain



To my Honoured
Neighbours and Friends,
The GENTLEMEN of Clapham.
GENTLEMEN,

THIS Sermon having
stray'd as far as the
Press without my
Consent, as it usually happens
with run-away Children, is

The Dedication.

at length return'd again to the
Parent.

The least I can do for it
under these Circumstances, is
to give it a Recommendation
to my Friends, and especially
to you, who a few Months ago
expressed a Desire to take it off
my Hands.

To you therefore, Gentlemen,
I now send it; and as I am
ordered by the Will of
Almighty

The Dedication.

*Almighty God, and the Favour
of my Friends to another Sta-
tion, I leave it with you, not
only as a Testimony of the Re-
spect I bear you for the many
Civilities I have receiv'd, but
also as a Memorial of my Be-
haviour during my Residence
in this Place.*

*Accept it then in good part,
and let that Divine Grace,
which is the Subject of these
Pages,*

The Dedication.

*Pages, still shine forth in your
Carriage to each other, and to
me, who am with great Respect
and Sincerity,*

GENTLEMEN,

Your most

Obedient Servant,

Clapham, Dec.

15, 1725.

Tho. Stamper.



I CO R. XIII. 13:

*And now abideth FAITH,
HOPE, CHARITY, these
Three; but the greatest of
these is CHARITY.*

GOD was pleas'd to endow the first Professors of the Gospel with a great Variety of Spiritual Gifts, necessary to train up the infant Religion to a proper Degree of Strength and Perfection. St. Paul makes Mention of these

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Endowments, and exhorts his *Corinthian* Converts to seek them: *Covet*, says he, *earnestly the best Gifts*, that is, Gifts by which they might honourably promote their own Interest, and effectually advance the Welfare of others. Now every thing that we have or enjoy is, strictly speaking, a Gift, and God alone giveth us to will and to do of his good Pleasure; but those Abilities, by which we are enabled to make our selves useful to Mankind, to instruct them in the Knowledge, and persuade them to the Practice of Religion; those are the greatest Accomplishments of a Christian: They are, to speak in the Language of the Apostle, the best Gifts. These Gifts however are liable to Abuse, and may be

of Universal Benevolence.

be employ'd in such a Manner, as not to answer the Intention of the Donor, nor the Expectation of Beholders. The Apostle therefore prescribes the way to make those Abilities useful to all; He points out the Means by which those superior Gifts and Graces might be made most conducive to their own Credit, most beneficial to the Good of all; that is, by using them according to the Measure, and by the Rule of Charity: For Charity is the Basis of all Accomplishments, and gives a Recommendation to all Gifts; without which, the greatest Perfection of Mind, the noblest Endowments of the Soul are but as it were unprofitable Blessings, and speculative Ornaments; but *as sounding*
Brass

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Brass or a tinkling Cymbal. All Qualifications, by which we may instruct and reform Mankind, all Divine Graces, by which we may cheer and comfort our selves, even Faith, that carries us through all Difficulties, and Hope, that supports us in all Distresses, submit to Charity as their Superior: *The greatest of these is Charity:* In the further Prosecution of which Words, I propose in the following Order to shew,

I. What Charity is in it self.

II. Its Excellency in the general. And,

III. Its particular Worth and Excellency, as it is prefer'd to
Faith,

of Universal Benevolence.

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Faith, and Hope; and then conclude with a Word of Application.

And first I am to shew what Charity is in it self.

Now Charity is such a Principle of universal Love, as inclines Men to do all those friendly Offices which the Circumstances of others may stand in need of, or their own good Fortune may enable them to do; or so to wish the Welfare of all, as they desire the Assistance of others themselves in the like Circumstance. Let not him therefore that sets up for a Man of the strictest Justice, think he is endued with true Charity. It is one thing to give, and another to pay; and, as it is only the Property

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perty of Justice to give every Man his own, that which he may claim either by a natural or legal Right, and which cannot be denied without evident Wrong, so even profane and irreligious Men go often so far; nor is it a Virtue when they do, because their Conduct does not proceed from Choice and Principle, from a generous Zeal to do what is good, but a sordid Motive of Fear or Shame; often from Constraint and Necessity too. But where Love and Charity flourish, there is that Disposition of Soul that puts Men upon doing all good Offices, without Regard to secular Views, and beyond the Compulsion of human Laws. This Virtue works upon the Heart and Affections, and inclines us to shew

of Universal Benevolence.

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a Benevolence to all, even those who are Strangers to us by Climate, and Aliens by Profession. It so qualifies the Heat of Passion, and sways the Byass of Party Prejudice, as to make us kind and courteous to them, from whom we may have Reason to expect Ingratitude for Civility, and Hatred for Good-will. He that loves all Men for God's Sake, and their own, that is willing to promote the Welfare of all to the utmost of his Power, and when Power is wanting, supplicates for them at the Throne of Grace; He is the truly charitable Man: For Charity, in short, is a Benevolence of Soul, that always endeavours to do Good, and is not to be sway'd by any Considerations from doing it.

B

And

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And thus having shewn what
Charity is in it self, we come to
consider, Secondly, its Excellency in
general. And here I can follow no better
Guide than the great Apostle, or
shew in a more significant Method
than by explaining his Words,
what are the true Properties of
Charity, and how far it exceeds
all both acquired, and natural En-
dowments. St. Paul himself has
given it the Preference even to the
Gifts of the Holy Ghost. For tho'
we speak with the Tongues of
Men, if we have the Command
of all Languages, and even the
mighty Power of Eloquence, so
that we can work upon human
Passions, and command their Af-
fections as we think fit, if we do
not

of Universal Benevolence.

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not use this Talent to their Benefit in the Cause of Innocence, and the Defence of Truth, but seek our private Advancement and Glory; what will this sacred Privilege avail, but to betray our Insincerity, and multiply our Guilt?

Had we yet more the Tongues of Angels, could we converse with glorified Beings, be Masters of that comprehensive Knowledge which Cherubims and Seraphims needs must have; These, if not made subservient to good Uses, will but tend to increase our Vanity, make us more proud, and less useful.

But further, tho' we have the Gift of Prophecy, and understand all Mysteries and all Knowledge; what if we were endued with Inspiration, could trace the Source

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and Cause of things before they existed, and discern the ultimate Issue of them, while yet they lie hid in the Womb of Causes. What if we could unfold the Mysteries of Providence, its secret Counsels and hidden Resolutions, could dive into the Properties of every Creature, and apply 'em all to their best Uses. Nay, tho' we had Faith to remove Mountains, Power to command and influence things that are not subject to human Nature, to do all that is morally impossible to be done. If with all these Accomplishments of Grace, we have not the Heavenly Gift of Charity to employ 'em all to the Honour of God, and the Good of his Creatures (those Creatures I mean for whose Sake He

was

was pleas'd to confer those Abilities on us) we are yet nothing; not the better for those Excellencies, but more unworthy in the Sight of God, who respects our Actions, not our Faculties : And it were to be wish'd we had not been so distinguish'd by Powers, but endued with greater Probity of Manners.

In the next place, Charity is more excellent than the most heroick Virtue can prove : *For if I bestow all my Goods,* says St. Paul, *to feed the Poor,* tho' a Man be got above the Love of Money, and can part with his Wealth as freely as he got it ; tho' he divides his Fortune in his Life-time, not to his Sons, his Relations, or Friends, but wholly to the Poor,
the

the ignorant Orphan, and the impotent Cripple; tho' he gives all, and makes no Reserves even for himself, against the Decays of Age or Sickness, but chuses to endure the Misery of Poverty, rather than see 'em in the Person of another; if he is not govern'd by a Principle of Charity, in this great Liberality, but seeks only human Praise and Approbation, to be thought a Man of a generous Temper, and greater Benevolence than his Neighbours: It is all nothing. He does not so much give, as exchange his Wealth; he parts with his Right to Money in hand, for that which he esteems as more valuable, the Applause of Men. But let him not hope for any other Recompence, if we do our Alms
to

to be seen of Men, we have no Reward of our Father which is in Heaven; no, tho' he gives his Body to be burnt (and Self-Love of all the Passions is first and last) yet if a Man sets no more Value on his Life, than he does on his Estate, and chuses to meet Death with all its Terrors, to undergo the Fate of the vilest Criminal, and suffer the highest Degrees of Torture; if he does it not for the Sake of God or his Religion, it profiteth him nothing.

The Martyr is lost in all his Bravery, his Courage will pass for no more than Fool-hardiness; and when Pride or Ambition is the Motive of great Actions, Honour and Fame will be all the Recompence. Men in such Cases put
the

The Nature, and Excellency

the greatest Cheat they can upon themselves. What if they get the Applause of the Croud, it is when they cannot be sensible of it ; and by dying so as a Fool dieth ; without any Sense of Danger or Fear ; they lose the Opportunity of working out a Salvation with Fear and Trembling. But all that we do upon a charitable Account, tho' at a less Expence, will in the end be more profitable ; for all that is spent for the Honour of God, and the Good of his Creatures, for the least thing that is given to a Disciple, or only in the Name of a Disciple ; we have the Authority of our Saviour in the Case, we shall not lose our Reward.

Thus a Principle of Charity is more laudable than the greatest Endow-

Endowments of Mind, or Fortune, when any Degree of that Charity is wanting; but it will still be found more glorious, if we proceed further to its genuine Effects.

Thus *St. Paul* will give us the best Account of all its Properties. And first he tells us it suffers long and is kind, a Man that is endued with true Charity, is not apt to fall into a Passion, he keeps a Calm and Serenity of Soul; and tho' he is not insensible of the Wrongs that others may intend, is yet easy in himself, benign and courteous toward all, as well Enemies as Friends. It envieth not, doth not dispose a Man to Envy, or make him repine that another Person has more Prosperity, and less Merit than himself. Vaunteth not it self, does not make a Man proud and insolent, or plume, as the *Pharisee* did of old, as being more given to Forms of Religion, than those about him.

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Is not puffed up, does not swell the Mind of a good Man, and make him look down upon every one with Scorn and Contempt. Doth not behave it self unseemly, stoops to the lowest Offices of Humanity, and does all with an easy Compliance, and a becoming Decency. Seeketh not her own, does not make a Man close and selfish, but prompts him to regard the common Good, and so to look on his own Things, as not to overlook another's Interest. Is not easily provoked, will not suffer a Man to give way to Passion, or by way of Resentment return an Injury. Thinketh no Evil, is not given to Obloquy and Detraction, but in Cases where there is any Doubt, puts the best Construction the Thing will bear. Rejoyceth not in Iniquity, takes no Satisfaction in seeing the Faults or Follies of Mankind, but looks upon others

others Misfortunes with Pity, Misconduct, with Grief; but rejoiceth in the Truth, is pleased and transported when Men live up to the Rules of Christianity, and Goodness and Virtue seem to flourish.

Charity again beareth all things, covers and draws a Veil over those Failings which Justice does not require to expose. Believeth all things, all that is delivered upon a reasonable Ground, and with a moral Assurance. Hopeth all things, where there is a just Suspicion of Mens Conduct, is willing to hope it is not bad; and when it is bad without dispute, does not despair of a Reformation.

And, *Lastly*, Charity endureth all things, is fix'd and steady under all the Changes of Life and Fortune, enduring the worst with Christian Fortitude, and patient Continuance in Well-doing.

The Nature, and Excellency

Thus far our Apostle has given us a Character of Charity in general, and what Virtue is there so eminent as this, that leads a Man thro' all Parts of his Duty, and makes him happy in spite of the World?

What remains in this Chapter, on the Subject in hand, more justly falls under my third Head, wherein I am to shew the Excellency of Charity, as it is prefer'd to Faith, and Hope.

Now it is natural to suppose, from this Superiority which St. *Paul* ascribes to the Virtue of Charity, that Faith and Hope are next in Dignity, and have a better Pretence than any other Grace to stand with it in Competition.

But as eminent as they both may appear to be, they are plainly deficient in respect of Charity, upon these following Considerations.

First,

First, They are not so certain of their Object.

Secondly, They do not afford so much Pleasure. And,

Thirdly, Are not so durable Virtues as Charity is.

First, Faith and Hope are so far imperfect, as they are not certain of their Object. Faith is an Assent to a divine Truth, founded upon a divine Testimony; but in this there is an evident Possibility of being mistaken: for as much as all divine Truths whatsoever must be handed down by the fallible Means of human Conveyance.

Hope also is a Virtue that respects Futurity, something that may or may not come to pass: *For what a Man hath*, says the Apostle, *why doth he yet hope for?* But every thing future is uncertain, so far at least as it depends upon something wherein human Nature may be deceiv'd.

Thus

The Nature, and Excellency

Thus Faith may happen in all Cases to be ill-grounded, and Hope may possibly be disappointed ; but Charity never can : That can never want Objects enough to exercise it self, while we have Friends, Relations, or Enemies ; nay, while there are Men.

For this Reason, that Faith and Hope respect the Future, and are somewhat uncertain, they are not reckoned among the Attributes of God ; for he being All-sufficient in Himself, the Spring and Fountain of all Truth, and possess'd of all the Happiness He can possibly enjoy, cannot be said to believe or hope ; for how should Faith find any Room, where there is Omniscience ? or how can Hope be entertained, where there is Omnipotence ? But so far is Charity an Attribute of God, that I fear not to call it the Quintessence of his Perfections ; I had almost said the
very

very Effence of his Being, for God is Love.

But then again, Faith and Hope do not afford so much Pleasure in the Exercise, as Charity doth; yet it must be own'd a high Entertainment to employ our Minds in holy Speculations, to meditate upon those unintelligible Mysteries, which God has reveal'd for the Exercise of our Faith. Nor is it a thing of indifferent Satisfaction, to reflect upon those exceeding Felicities, which God has proposed for the Objects of our Hope, and as Motives of a good and pious Life. But still the Exercise of Faith and Hope is always attended with this melancholly Reflection, that we are as yet in a State of Insufficiency, and a great way off from the thing that we desire; whereas Charity argues something of Ability, it shews we are easy and content at home, when

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when we can spare something for our Neighbours Good, and gives a sweet Satisfaction to the Mind, when we do those good Offices, which our Hearts and Minds desire should be done.

In the last Place, the Exercise of Faith and Hope is not so durable as that of Charity, for they are confined to the present Life, and cannot extend beyond Mortality ; all they can do is to support us here under the Troubles and Pressures of Life, to refresh us in this barren and dry Wilderness, where no Water is ; that is, no Satisfaction equal to the Cares and Fatigues we meet with. But they, when we approach the Confines of the Grave, come within sight of the promised Land, and are ready to enter the heavenly *Canaan*, they must be content with a bare Prospect, and, like *Moses*, die upon the Borders, there they cease, and
are

of Universal Benevolence.

are no more. But Charity passes the Iron Gate of Death it self, that will exist to endless Ages, and be the great Employment of Heaven; where tho' Prophecy shall cease, because we shall see and know all things, even as we our selves are known, by a Communication with the divine Being; where tho' Tongues shall be done away, and one universal Language shall prevail (if glorified Saints have any Language) for then the Glory and Praise of God will be all our Entertainment: When all these Gifts and Graces shall be extinct, Charity will not fail.

Nor is it Matter of Wonder that Charity should be found in Heaven, where there is nothing of Sin or Folly, where there is nothing of Hatred or Discord; where there is no Interruption of Peace, but every Object is an Object of Love.

D

But

26. *The Nature, and Excellency*

But let not the Preference ^{giver} to Charity bring Faith or Hope into Disrepute, let 'em flourish together, and adorn each other; and such is the mutual Connection between all, they support and cherish one the other; so that where Faith and Hope are vigorous, there never is any Defect of Charity; nor where there is a fervent Charity, can Faith and Hope languish and decay. The more earnestly we hope, and the more stedfastly we believe in the Promise of God; the more diligently we shall serve him, and the more intensely we shall love him. And if we love him in the least Degree that he loveth us, our Faith will be founded, as it were, upon a Rock, and our Hope will prove as an Anchor of the Soul, sure and stedfast.

What now remains, in the Close of this Point, but to exhort you in
one

of Universal Benevolence.

one Word, and that of our Apostle : *Above all things, my Brethren, put on Charity ; be ye kind and courteous, be ye free and generous, as ye are Men and Brethren love one another ; extend your Love and Benevolence to all, all that are made by the same God, all that believe in the same God, all that carry the same Image of God about them.* Why should Mountains and Valleys, Desarts, or Seas stop the Course of Humanity ? We must look upon our selves as Subjects at large, and Citizens of the World ; then the most rude and barbarous People will be our Countrymen, will be our Friends. Far be it from us to be partial in good Works, if our Ability is sufficient, our Charity should be general ; and thus far our Ability must always be sufficient, that when we can't assist others by outward Good Offices,

The Nature, &c.

ces, we may at least be useful to them in our Prayers.

Without any Reserve then let us love one another, by this Means testifying our Love of God; so will he give us the greatest Proof, in the World to come, as he has given us already many, in this, that he is the God of Love.

To whom, &c.



F I N I S.